

Editorial

On 21st May of this year, all countries of the world celebrated the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. In education, diversity is of various shapes and forms. Educators have to deal with students and families that are different in their race, ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, language, physical and mental ability, gender, etc. Diversity in education has taken center stage given the increased frequency of migration and contact among people from different backgrounds, facilitated by cheaper travel and the ubiquitous information and communications technologies.

In an ambitious initiative by UNESCO most countries of the world agreed on targets aimed at providing equitable access to quality education to all individuals (children, youth, and adults) by the year 2015. Specific targets were set in the areas of early childhood care and education; universal primary education; youth and adult skills; adult literacy; gender parity and equality; and quality of education. The idea was that no one should be left behind because of his or her background characteristics. The target year (2015) is less than six months away. Will it simply come and pass, like many other targets that told us that something will be achieved “by the year 2000”? Whatever happens, the concerted efforts by all educational authorities in the world have put the issue of diversity where it belongs: at the center of the work of educators.

The issues of diversity is of paramount importance for us at IJES. The International Islamic University, where IJES is hosted, is designed to be a microcosm of the ummah. Moreover, as educators, we know very well that to be a good teacher, one needs to have the knowledge and skills for understanding learners as individuals,

in addition to mastering the curriculum contents and methods of instruction. In education, there is no “one size fits all”. This explains why most of the papers in this issue of *IJES* are attempts to deal with the issue of diversity in one way or another.

The first article by Che Noraini Hashim, Syed Marwan Mujahid Syed Azman, and Sharifah Nur Asmaa Syed Azman deals with the issue of diversity at the highest levels. The authors argue that while it may be true that most institutions of higher learning somehow stifle freedom of expression and any views that might appear critical of the policies of institutions and governments, the main challenge to educators are their own fears and inhibitions.

The second article by Ziyana Salim Al Harthy, Suhailah Hussien, and Hamoud Bin Khalfan Al Harthy is an intervention to try to improve the performance of teachers in schools. Using action research methodology, the authors tried not only to find out how teachers teach but also to enhance their skills through a process of reflective practice. While the focus of the paper is on teaching Life Skills in Omani schools, the insights it gives may be useful for all educators, especially those in Muslim countries. The main issue is that teachers fail to use effective tools and methodologies, such as the Interactive Teaching Methods used by the researchers here, not because they do not want, but due to lack of training, resources, and support. These insights have to be taken into consideration as we prepare teachers to deal with diversity.

To help teachers deal with linguistic diversity, Siti Maftuhah Damio and Hamimah Hashim studies the application of Autonomy in Language Learning (ALL). Noticing that the application of this potentially beneficial approach is stifled by debates about its nature and what it entails, the authors investigated the perceptions of trainee teachers. Their findings support the thesis of the centrality of culture in learning and why teachers must be prepared to deal with issues of diversity among their students. Continuing with the theme of language learning in a diverse environment, Mohamad Azrien

Mohamed Adnan; Shukeri Ahmad; and Arifin Mamat explored how and why Malaysian teachers use Bahasa Malaysia in teaching Arabic language. While their focus is on L2 teaching methodology, their work is nevertheless important for understanding language diversity.

The fifth article by Madihah Khalid and Hassan Rahman discusses the application of Problem-based Learning in teaching mechanical science. The findings support the hypothesis that giving students authentic learning experiences helps them to learn better.

The final article by Mastura Badzis and Mimi Fitriana Zaini deals with children having Autistic Spectrum Disorders and how to identify and start helping them at an early stage. While research has shown that early interventions can help children with ASDs lead normal lives and have successful academic lives, lack of information among primary healthcare workers, teachers and parents makes many children to miss timely interventions.

Obviously, the papers included in this volume do not comprehensively cover the entire gamut of diversity or inclusiveness in education. Our hope is that they may stimulate a conversation about the issues raised. Given the international orientation of the journal, it will be interesting to find out how other parts of the Muslim world are performing with regards to providing equitable access to quality education. The future of the ummah ultimately depends on the kind of education we give to each and every one of its members.

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Editor